



**Testimony of Patricia L. Selby,
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**Before the Michigan House
Redistricting and Elections Committee
April 17, 2012**

Good morning. My name is Pat Selby. I work for Project Vote as Election Counsel and Manager, Michigan Election Administration Program, and I am also affiliated with Michigan Voice. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am speaking to you today to oppose Senate Bills 751, 754, and 803. These bills will make voting less convenient and accessible. We need to increase the number of people participating in our democracy, not reduce it. Democracy works best when every Michigander participates.

Witnesses from the League of Women Voters, NAACP and others will or have ably addressed this committee on the issue of voter registration drives. Barriers to registration are barriers to voting, and we oppose this unnecessary regulation of voter registration. We support and agree with their testimony fully.

I would like to address specifically the expansion of photo ID. SB 751 and SB 754 impose additional picture ID requirements for registering to vote and voting absentee. As other witnesses observe, Michigan's current voter identification methods work very well and meet federal standards. In addition, no case has been made for the need for increased scrutiny of voter identity.

I have heard committee members state previously that everyone should have photo ID. The Secretary of State's representatives were before this committee last month, testifying that only one-half percent of the voting age population lacked ID. If that figure is correct, then over 35,000 people in this state lack ID. That's 35,000 – if one accepts the Secretary's numbers – who will be potentially disenfranchised with these bills.

The fee for state IDs are waived for some categories of state residents: those who are blind, have had their license suspended due to a disability, or are over 65. Fee waivers are also available to residents in other contexts. But waiver of that \$10 charge is not enough. Contrary to what you have been told, photo ID is not free. In fact, it is a difficult, costly, and time-consuming thing to obtain.

In order to obtain a state identification card, Michigan residents must produce no fewer than five documents to prove their identity, legal presence in the U.S., Social Security status, and residency in Michigan. No one document can be used for two things: as an example, even though a passport demonstrates both US citizenship and identity, the Secretary of State's office will not permit it to be used for both.

Proving legal presence is the most difficult and expensive of these requirements. A birth certificate (the Secretary of State requires a certified copy with a raised seal) is the most typical way to show a voter's legal presence in the U.S. The Michigan-approved vendor service costs \$36 (\$17, if you are over 65), not counting the \$8.50 online fee and shipping. Obtaining birth certificates from a county clerk is less expensive, ranging from \$10 to \$22, occasionally with a price break for senior citizens. For those born out of state, the cost can be even higher. These fees demonstrate that "free ID" from the Secretary of State's office is not, in fact, free.

In addition, because birth certificates are a restricted record in Michigan, there are more hoops to jump through to obtain one. First, you can only request your own birth certificate or that of your child – so a friend assisting an elderly person must be very careful.

A second barrier is Michigan's regulation that to obtain a copy of a birth certificate, the requester must produce a government-issued photo ID. This is an absolute Catch-22: one must have an ID to obtain a birth certificate needed to obtain an ID.

There are also barriers in time and access. The person requesting government-issued ID must be able to get to a Secretary of State's office. Because the applicant has no license, typically she will need someone to drive her to the branch. In the Upper Peninsula, there is typically one office per county – and the branch locations can be 50 miles or more apart.

In the Lower Peninsula, the branch locations are not quite as spread out. However, in my part of the downriver area of Detroit, the Secretary of State's offices are not even on bus lines. So again, the individual seeking an ID must rely on a ride to the branch office.

Secretary of State office locations have been reduced, due to increased on-line actions and tight state budgets. Fewer offices and staff mean the lines are long, for those actions that require a visit. An individual seeking a state ID must be able to endure whatever delay she encounters, a special burden for the elderly and those with disabilities. If the person at the counter does not accept any of the five documents the applicant has provided, that individual has to start all over again, and make arrangements to return.

This is not a process that occurs in the abstract. This process affects real people.

For instance, the Detroit Action Commonwealth assists people at three Detroit soup kitchens to obtain state-issued photo ID, by leveraging the efforts of University of Michigan students. They have assisted over 1,000 low income Detroiters. Their professor (and board chair at the affiliated Harriet Tubman Center), Dr. Greg Markus, states that assembling documents for these folks can take two to three months and often more than \$50. In an extreme case, it took *two years* to obtain the documents needed for a 62-year-old Detroit woman, who was born in rural South Carolina, to obtain the documents needed for an ID.

And these barriers are not limited to low income or indigent people. At a recent ACLU event, an elderly gentleman from Bloomfield explained that obtaining the necessary birth certificate for an ID would cost him \$100. He was born in Ohio, and would have to make his request in person.

My own daughter was out of state for a year, and on her return, attempted to obtain a temporary driver's license. She spent 45 minutes in line at the Secretary of State's office, before finding out she did not have the documents she needed. Because she had been out of state, it was difficult for her to assemble the necessary proof of residency. As mentioned earlier, her passport could prove her identity or her US citizenship status, but not both. Consequently, she had to return to the branch location to obtain her updated ID. Because she did not have a license, and no access to public transportation, this required both of us to miss work so that I could drive her to the Secretary of State.

My point is that ID is not easy to obtain, and it is not free. The process is difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. Expanding the application of government-issued picture ID to more aspects of the voting process burdens and hinders voters, and makes it more difficult for citizens to vote.

Photo ID requirements discriminate against those who do not have it and who find it hard or impossible to obtain. I urge you to vote against these new picture ID bills. Democracy works best when all citizens participate.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.